

### Homily for December 5, 2017

Once upon a time there were three trees talking among themselves about their futures. The first said it would like to be made into a cradle, so that it might go on living as a support for the new fragile life of a baby. The second tree wanted to be made into an ocean-going ship so that it might go on living carrying important cargo and seeing new lands. The third tree longed to stay right where it was, existing only as a tree, but growing ever taller and pointing ever higher to remind everyone that there was a God in heaven who loved them.

But soon there came woodcutters who hewed down these trees, and apparently also their dreams. The first tree was not made into a cradle, but was fashioned into a feeding trough, a manger for animals. But this manger was sold to a family in Bethlehem, and on the night that Jesus was born, this simple feed box became the cradle of the newborn Jesus. The second tree was built into a water vessel, but only a tiny simple fishing boat. A man named Simon Peter bought the boat, and on one warm afternoon when the crowds pressed in, Jesus climbed aboard this small craft so that he might preach. The third tree was not only deprived of its dream to remain standing, but its wood was fashioned into a horrible instrument of torture, a cross. But it was on this cross that Jesus was crucified, transforming that symbol of cruelty into an eternal reminder of God's eternal love for all of us.

Today in our reading from Isaiah we read how from the stump of Jesse, a shoot would come forth that would be a righteous tree. Remember who Jesse was? The Father of David. Of David we read in Psalm 72:

*May his name endure forever,  
his fame continue as long as the sun.  
May all nations be blessed in him;  
may they pronounce him happy.*

Now of course David's reign did come to an end and his royal line ended with the Babylonian Exile in 597 BC, some 400 plus years after David's death. But from that stump would come forth one whose name would endure forever, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus' birth, we know that one came into the world who showed us the way of true wisdom. Because of Jesus' ministry and Simon's boat Jesus began to declare to all who would listen that they could follow in this way of Wisdom and know in their own lives the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Because of his death on the Cross, Jesus reconciled the world to himself as expressed in the poetical language of the Isaiah's vision of the harmony and peace that would exist between the creatures that were naturally predators and prey:

But to grasp how the three trees of Jesus' birth, ministry and death can shape our own lives, means that we need a particular kind of perceiving. Jesus said as much in this evening's Gospel:

***you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will***

Who are the infants? They comprise of those people who are able to grow in wisdom and understanding as they apply to their own lives the teaching of Jesus. They find in the life of piety, where the Lord is truly honoured, the way to a greater interior freedom. This in turn gives to them the might and fortitude to be people of hope so they can see the grace of God at work in their lives. This is because they see in Jesus the one who is the true sign as expressed by Isaiah this way:

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

I think it amazing that what started as a shoot from the stump of David has become the tree that has expanded into all the earth. A tree that in the words of this famous carol has given people new birth because of His birth, new life because of his teaching and eternal hope because of that terrible tree which was the death of God and the life of man.

The tree of life my soul hath seen,  
Laden with fruit and always green;  
The trees of nature fruitless be  
Compared with Christ the Apple Tree.

His beauty doth all things excel;  
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell  
The glory which I now can see  
In Jesus Christ the Apple Tree.

For happiness I long have sought,  
And pleasure dearly I have bought;  
I missed of all, but now I see  
'Tis found in Christ the Apple Tree.

I'm weary with my former toil,  
Here I will sit and rest awhile;  
Under the shadow I will be,  
Of Jesus Christ the Apple Tree.

The fruit doth make my soul to thrive,  
It keeps my dying faith alive,  
Which makes my soul in haste to be  
With Jesus Christ the Apple Tree.